

AIDS and Religion
The Philadelphia Response

A Report to

**THE
PHILADELPHIA
COMMISSION ON AIDS**



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Executive Summary

Churches and synagogues in the U.S. have made some progress towards defining what their proper role is with regard to AIDS ministries. Many denominations have passed resolutions which deplore discrimination against persons with AIDS (PWAs) and urge increased governmental funding for AIDS research. Some, like the Union of America Hebrew Congregations, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Unitarian Universalist Association have produced curricula and pamphlets for congregants. Some denominations, like the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church, have actually hired full- or part-time consultants for AIDS work on a national level.

I used various categories to evaluate the educational materials put out by the national organizations. Was it slanted in any way, reflecting prejudice towards gay men? Could it be used by Christians and Jews, or by any Protestant group interchangeably? I evaluated the material in terms of its practicality.

The National Council of Churches has produced, and continually reviews, a packet of materials which would be very helpful to any Christian body. It gives an overview of approaches to AIDS ministries. It also calls upon the expertise of those who are working in congregations and have done such ministries. Among the mainline denominations, it seemed that the most thorough job of preparing materials had been done by the newly-merged Lutheran bodies. The Unitarian Universalists have also done an excellent job of creating materials for different age groups, though their material is suited for very liberal bodies. Among the Jewish bodies, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the Reform branch of American Judaism, has

published some excellent, insightful and helpful congregation materials. The Roman Catholic Bishops are now in the process of revising their first statement on AIDS. The one produced last year by the Administrative Board of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, with its controversial allusion to condoms, was accepted for use at the bishops' June meeting while a new one is being written. Except in some of the materials written for the Missouri Synod Lutherans (the denomination which chose not to merge with the other Lutheran Churches), I found little evidence of the use of the word "sin" to describe a person with AIDS who had gotten it through homosexual intercourse or drug use.

I interviewed many local denominational officials and clergy working in mainline churches in and immediately outside Philadelphia. I also spoke with a limited number of Black and Hispanic clergy. The Reverend Barry Hopkins has prepared the report on what the Black Churches are doing with AIDS ministries. I found that, regardless of the well-meaning resolutions and the good materials sent out from the national office, it is still those pastors and rabbis whose lives have been affected by the disease who are doing the lion's share of the work. They may have a congregant with the disease or they may have been touched by a PWA they heard speak. Very often these dedicated ministers and rabbis are operating without a lot of local denominational support.

Congregations around the city are engaged in creative and diverse ministries. For example, the First Unitarian Church put together a nine-week educational program. Explored were such topics as "AIDS 101" and the impact of the disease on families, friends, and lovers. If one is seeking a religious community which has dedicated itself to begin a place where PWAs can feel at home, the Episcopal church of St. Luke's and the Epiphany is the place

to go. St. John's Roman Catholic Church offers worship, counseling, and support services for those affected by AIDS. In the Reform movement of Judaism, a major conference has been held. Conservative Jewish youth are working to raise money for AIDS ministries in their congregations.

While some churches and synagogues have already developed ministries, most are just at the beginning of a process of finding out what their ministry is. Perhaps they, like some Presbyterian churches, have held day-long seminars. Or, like the Lutheran Task Force of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, they are training for going into congregations to talk about AIDS. The Reverend John Nesbitt has made a tremendous contribution to local Methodist AIDS ministries by sending out a questionnaire to 500 Methodist pastors in the area. Information from these questionnaires can be used to plan programs for future conference and synod work with persons affected by the illness. It's a lot of work, but other groups might be well-advised to survey their own area clergy.

Up until this point there has been no major interfaith effort. There was a well-attended conference sponsored by the Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia on AIDS ministries last January. The same ecumenical (inter-church) group will cooperate with Roman Catholic and Jewish groups in holding a conference for clergy on AIDS on November 15.

Hospitals chaplains tell me that PWAs, many of whom have been alienated from church or synagogue, do seek spiritual counseling in the hospital. One chaplain said that it would be helpful to have more dialogue between chaplains, who only see the person in the hospital, pastors, and rabbis. Conversations with chaplains at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania and other institutions show that committees are developing policies to combat discrimination and protect confidentiality.

It is encouraging to find that many churches and synagogues are beginning to ask how they can help persons affected by AIDS. But the question remains: why are religious groups in Philadelphia so far behind? Certainly our AIDS population justifies more concerted work. There is no easy answer to that question. Perhaps we must return to the simple fact that it is more likely that those who have members of their congregations or friends affected by the disease are more likely to get involved. Nonetheless, the religious community could profit by a close look at an organization like New York's Bailey House, the premier city AIDS residence, it has a strong pastoral care component, with a network of ministers across the city. Also noteworthy is St. Peter's Lutheran Church in NYC, which feeds PWAs. Not to mention a nondenominational group called "God's Love We Deliver", which sends PWAs gourmet meals.

Although in some ways we are behind, there is still time to catch up. There are some wonderful projects and people scattered around Philadelphia. The need to be recognized. They need to recognize each other. What follows are some recommendations for future interfaith work.

The following recommendations offer suggestions for local officials and congregations seeking to define their role as caregivers.

1. AN INTERFAITH COORDINATOR SHOULD BE HIRED TO DEVELOP AND HELP COORDINATE THE EFFORT OF LOCAL CLERGY. THIS AGENCY WOULD GIVE SUPPORT TO CLERGY, KEEP TRACK OF AIDS MINISTRIES AND REFER CLIENTS IN NEED OF PASTORAL CARE TO THE APPROPRIATE PERSON. THE AVENUES FOR ECUMENICAL COOPERATION SHOULD BE STRENGTHENED IN AIDS MINISTRIES.
2. JUDICATORY OFFICIALS NEED TO SENSITIZE THEMSELVES TO ISSUES FACING CLERGY WHO ARE WORKING WITH THOSE AFFECTED BY AIDS.
3. LOCAL JUDICATORIES SHOULD USE THEIR STATUS IN THE COMMUNITY AND SUPPORT THE FUNDING OF AIDS SERVICES AND EDUCATION AS WELL AS STATE THEIR OPPOSITION TO DISCRIMINATION AT CITY, STATE, AND LOCAL LEVELS.
4. LOCAL CLERGY AND LAITY SHOULD WORK WITH THE CITY AND NEIGHBORHOOD LEADERS TO PROMOTE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE WITH REGARD TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF RESIDENTIAL HOUSING FOR PWAS AND DRUG REHABILITATION PROGRAMS.
5. ALL CLERGY AND INTERESTED LAITY SHOULD CALL THEIR CONGREGATIONS TO BE AWARE OF THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF AIDS ON FAMILIES, INDIVIDUALS, AND INSTITUTIONS.
6. JUDICATORIES SHOULD INSTITUTE A STRUCTURE TO MAKE AVAILABLE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR LOCAL PARISHES AND CONGREGATIONS AND TO KEEP ABREAST OF NATIONAL OFFICE INITIATIVES IN THE AREA OF AIDS MINISTRY.

INTRODUCTION

In the Spring, 1987, issue of the United Church of Christ Council for Health and Human Services Ministries Report (CHHSM), the Reverend Morris Floyd wrote an article titled "The AIDS Crisis: Challenge to the Churches." In it, Floyd, an AIDS activist and nonprofit consultant, used the story of the Good Samaritan to analyze the predicament of churches in responding to AIDS. "Perhaps like the priest and the Levite," he said, "we have been unable to overcome the very real fears and concerns that have limited our response." Floyd urged denominations and local churches to become involved in AIDS ministries, pastorally, financially, educationally, on the level of public policy and personally. "A failure to meet this challenge will be a failure to meet the challenge of the Gospel," he concluded.

In fact, Christians and Jewish groups could play any of the roles in the parable. As the Good Samaritan, denominations have passed resolutions deploring discrimination and endorsing action on behalf of persons with AIDS (PWAs) and their families on both the national and local levels. Some, like the United Church of Christ, the American Friends Services Committee, and the Episcopal Church have full or part-time staff working on AIDS ministries. The newly merged Lutheran denomination, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Unitarian-Universalists' and the National Council of Churches AIDS Task Force have produced extensive and varied study pieces, ranging from educational materials for small children to suggestions on how to shape public policy. Judicatories have also formed task forces, passed resolutions at local meetings, and held conferences for clergy and laypersons. At the national and judicatory levels,

the Christian and Jewish communities have begun to respond in a meaningful way to a crisis which will sorely test their resources.

On the other hand, there are serious gaps between what the denominations mandate and what the local congregations actually do. Although the large religious groups have made strong statements, communication of these ideals to local congregations is not always a high priority. In fact, it is usually those who have persons with AIDS (PWAs) in their congregation who are impelled to act like the Good Samaritan. The catalyst to ministry is the personal connection with someone who is ill.

Later in this report, the action of local churches and synagogues will be examined. A few caveats must be entered. I hope that this report will give a picture of what many denominations, judicatories and local communities are doing to alleviate the isolation many PWAs feel and to fight the fear and prejudice that reside even within the walls of the church or the synagogue. This researcher tried to cover the mainline churches and Jewish organizations. The Reverend Barry Hopkins spoke to ministers in various churches with a predominately black membership for their perspective on a disease that affects a disproportionate number of black men, women and children. Work still needs to be done with individual nondenominational Protestant churches. The original goal was to speak to two local representatives of each denomination, one who had been active in AIDS ministries and one who had not. In fact, it was more helpful to follow my nose, to be directed from my initial contact who might have mentioned someone else already active. Often, this other person was not a pastor, but an AIDS activist. Some of my discussions, like the one held with workers at My Brother's House, are not easy to categorize. I suppose, like most projects, this one could have gone on forever. But, I hope that it will, like a Chinese menu, allow you to sample the taste and texture

of many different places and opinions. This report is also written with the recognition that, as the epidemic spreads, more and more churches and synagogues will clamor for help in addressing the varied needs of PWAs and the questions of their people.

Pastors should also be prepared to provide care for PWAs and conduct education in worship. Congregations should support caregivers and use the resources of their churches in AIDS ministries.

The three Boards also call upon the church agencies and local conferences to work on behalf of the civil rights of those infected with HIV disease. The churches should support AIDS education as well as drug education in schools and in the churches.

This is a rather comprehensive resolution. It will be interesting to see what kind of action the Methodists are taking to make this concrete.

THE UMC AT THE CONFERENCE LEVEL

The recommended contact person was Mr. Kelly Miller, a layperson, who commutes to the national Methodist headquarters in New York. Up until this spring, Miller chaired the conference committee on church and society. He said the conference has sponsored one workshop last fall for pastors. A year ago (last June) the Annual conference had established an AIDS Task Force under the Health and Welfare Commission, but without financing. After restructuring the budget, the commission had \$500 for AIDS. In other words, there wasn't a whole lot going on. But, there is a pastor at St. Marks in Broomall, who did a wonderful survey of local pastors and their information about AIDS. More on John Nesbitt in the individual churches section.

THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Episcopal Church is structured much like the Roman Catholics. Headquartered in New York, it operates in dioceses and has bishops. Episcopalians elect bishops, however, and do not give allegiance to the Pope.

Every three years the church meets in a General Convention, the most recent of which occurred in Detroit this past July.

To give the reader an idea about what has been going on in Episcopal circles I will crib from an article I wrote for the "Episcopalian" in April of 1988.

...many communities had already started programs before the 1985 General Convention approved a resolution with guidelines for AIDS ministries. Denouncing discrimination against "AIDS victims" the 68th General Convention called upon the Church to begin "the development of programs of awareness, education and prevention concerning AIDS." The Convention also urged the Church to begin ministries to men and women affected by AIDS. In March of 1986, a group of Episcopal organizations held a national conference on AIDS at San Francisco's Grace Cathedral. By May of that year, the Presiding Bishop had made the Reverend Lynne Coggi the AIDS consultant to the Church. Coggi's first task was to prepare materials for the November 9, 1986, Day of Prayer. Since that time, she says "I have seen every diocese jump on board with AIDS ministries one way or the other." Coggi has visited over 100 parishes within the past two years...

I had a chance to talk with parishes around the country. Although San Francisco has been the pacesetter for AIDS, parishes in Dallas and Connecticut have also worked on the AIDS problem. There is a New England (Province I) AIDS network. The Presiding Bishop has supported all of this work, and told the Convention that he was going to be a "buddy" for a PWA. There is some talk of hiring another person to work with Coggi (who is part-time).

The Episcopal Church now has a national network called the Episcopal AIDS Coalition. The general convention allocated \$40,000 per year to the coalition, and established a joint Commission on AIDS. The convention also directed the Washington issues office to adopt a strategy for comprehensive health care delivery and proclaimed the second Sunday in October as the annual day of prayer for persons "touched by the AIDS epidemic." There were many more resolutions along the same lines as those of other denominations. But I gather from what others have said, that the Episcopal Church has made some

commitments, financially and politically, that other churches haven't yet been willing to make.

EPISCOPALIANS AT THE DIOCESAN LEVEL

The church has had some very committed persons working on AIDS for the past two and a half years. In March, 1986, the Diocesan Council (one of the overseeing committees of the Diocese of Pennsylvania) called for the creation of an AIDS committee. Once formed, the committee began work on a number of issues, including discrimination and advocacy. It also found out what resources were available for persons affected by AIDS in the Philadelphia area and wrote grant proposals to help PWAs. The event that made AIDS a public issue in the diocese was a conference in November, 1986. Extremely well attended, the day-long event featured Dr. Mathilde Krim and Bishop William Swing of the Diocese of California as keynote speakers. Since that event, members of the committee have worked extremely hard, traveling around the diocese, speaking at deanery meetings and individual parishes.

In January, 1987, the outgoing Bishop Lyman Ogilby, and the newly elected Bishop Allen Bartlett, wrote a pastoral letter about AIDS. "Every human being, baptized into Christ's community, is a child of God and full heir of the Kingdom, with an equal claim upon the full pastoral care and ministry of the church" they asserted. They spoke out against discrimination and spoke up for more "education, compassion and prayer."

The diocese has just begun a massive fund drive. AIDS ministry was in the mission strategy budget, to the tune of \$450,000, but the goal has been slashed. This spring AIDS ministry was taken out of the budget, but the last I heard, it had been put back in, with less money (\$250,000) to be sought. I do know that the National Episcopal Churchwomen's United Thank Offering has

approved a grant of \$20,000 to hire someone to do AIDS ministry in Action AIDS. It will become clearer this fall and in the next few years what kind of financial commitment the diocese can make to this ministry. At the moment, the Diocesan Committee is actively setting funding for an AIDS coordinator.

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

The Society of Friends are distinctly unhierarchical. According to Guy Weston, who works in the national office of the AFSC (American Friends Service Committee) directives are not issued to anybody. All meetings (the best approximate word would be congregation) are independent. Everything is achieved through consensus and consultation. The AFSC is the social and political agency of the Society of Friends.

Although the Friends are non-hierarchical, there are regional executives who get together regularly to discuss AFSC business. Those on the AFSC board represent the different regions.

Weston was hired last fall to coordinate AIDS work for the AFSC. Previously, he did AIDS surveillance work for the Philadelphia Health Department. He says that eight or nine regions are working on social or advocacy issues. He is responsible for making sure that basic information on AIDS is available to all of the regional offices who want it. While the New York office is working with Haitian women affected by AIDS, Weston says that there is not much going on in the Philadelphia area. Once more, it is important to note that the AFSC doesn't speak for the individual meetings. Nonetheless, a local Quaker I spoke to told me that while he personally is an ACTION AIDS volunteer, there wasn't much going on at his meetings.

METROPOLITAN CHRISTIAN COUNCIL OF PHILADELPHIA

The Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia (MCCP) sponsored the January, 1988, conference on "The Healing Community: The Religious Response to AIDS." The body, which represents fifteen Protestant and Orthodox denominations, is active in many areas. The speakers, who included a wide range of medical and religious authorities, addressed many sensitive issues. For many of the clergy and laypeople who attended, it was their first exposure to AIDS education. The fact that 189 individuals attended indicated an area interest in AIDS ministries. That interest has been followed up by the MCCP whose conference committee continues to work to fulfill conference recommendations. Projects under consideration include: development of Bible Study programs, workshops on pastoral counseling for clergy and lay leaders, and a conference on human sexuality in early 1989. Representatives from the MCCP, The Union of American Hebrew Congregations and Roman Catholic Pastors are planning an AIDS pastoral training session November 15, at Graduate Hospital.

At its quarterly session this June, the MCCP Board passed two AIDS resolutions. One calls the service provisions for PWAs in the city "woefully inadequate" and calls upon the Governor to designate a minimum of \$10 million dollars for AIDS programs for the fiscal year 1988-1989. The other supports the Philadelphia public schools AIDS confidentiality policy.

Part II

OUT ON A LIMB IN PHILADELPHIA:

THE IMPACT OF AIDS ON CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR CLERGY

As I have noted, national denominations are good at passing resolutions, as are judicatories. They are not always as good at carrying them out. This is certainly the case with the health crisis posed by AIDS. I did not talk to anyone who did not have the "right principles:" against discrimination, in favor of full human rights for PWAs. I did talk to men and women working at the judicatory level who felt frustrated by lack of funds or out of touch with their denomination, which is to be expected. Nonetheless, no judicatory seems to have taken concerted and effective action in promoting ministry to PWAs.

Instead, perhaps inevitably, the story of AIDS ministries in Philadelphia is the story of individuals who were committed enough to involve themselves, and sometimes their synagogue or church. One finds them in congregations with a history of liberal social mores, like the First Unitarian Church, the suburban St. Mark's Methodist Church, and in the Reform Jewish Congregation, Rodeph Shalom. One also sees them at St. John's Roman Catholic Church or working in minority communities.

Perhaps these men and women are the milestones which point to a future in which a lot more people will be working on AIDS ministries. As this report is written, ministries are taking shape, grant proposals are being written, and meetings are being held with denominational heads. It is simply too early to tell whether the religious community will mobilize to face the epidemic or will choose instead to let those good-hearted souls hang out there on a limb.

This section of the report introduces some of those institutions and persons out there on the limbs.

Violette Phillips is a member of the congregation at the First Unitarian Church. The editor of Philadelphia CITY PAPER, Phillips has been a member of the church for two years. She says that the church, which has a membership of 250 people (roughly 100 attend on Sundays), tends to attract very well-educated people. "Most believe there is a God force" she says. Members serve on a number of church committees: social activities, social responsibility and religious education. Everyone seems to do something, she says. The social responsibility committee has been very active in other areas, such as having a food cupboard, and being a part of the People's Bail Fund. The church is also part of a coalition of inner-city churches, which Phillips hopes will be active in social justice outreach.

At a meeting of the Committee more than a year ago, the decision was made to develop and carry out forums on AIDS. In the fall of 1987, the AIDS Action and Social Responsibility Group held nine programs on AIDS. Topics ranged from "AIDS 101", to the spiritual dimensions of AIDS, to personal witness, to the impact AIDS has had on the lives of those who live with and love PWAs. Phillips herself has lost a good friend to AIDS. At the end of the series the group made a 30-minute video, intended for use by other UU congregations, or other churches and groups interested in setting up a similar series of forums. The group also worked on quilt panels for the National Names Project.

Phillips says that most of the congregation is not that well-informed about AIDS. She guessed that 25-30 people had participated actively. She said that it had been hard to work ecumenically. It would be great to have a clearing house where everyone could get together, she felt. The coalition of churches will provide a good test of whether a relatively small group of churches can work together on social justice projects.

I also called the Unitarian Church in Germantown. The assistant minister told me that her congregation had not been as active. In fact, very few churches or synagogues in the city have put together a similar program. First Unitarian is also the home church of Bea Latif and Emily Kahn, who worked on the educational material for the Lutherans about how to talk to your children about AIDS.

The Metropolitan Christian Church has met in the Unitarian Church building for the last five years. The Reverend Joseph Gilbert is the pastor of the 75-person church; it has been in the city for sixteen years.

There are about 25,000-35,000 MCC members around the United States. An "ordinary old-fashioned Trinitarian church", the MCC is liturgically still in the process of unfolding. Most of the parishioners are lesbian and gay, "cut off from their emotions in the larger society." Because there is only one church in the city, it is included here. The church does have an international, regional and national structure. Clergy and laypeople share authority. There is also a General Council, which has its home in Los Angeles. Representatives from the districts meet every two years to re-write bylaws and take action. It is hard for them to do a lot of AIDS programming, because their budget is tiny compared to large denominations. Gilbert has pastored this congregation for five years. He is also in charge of satellite congregations in Wilmington, DE and Reading, PA. When I spoke to Gilbert this past winter, he had six people who tested positive for HIV-infection, and one who may have ARC in his congregation. Along with other MCC congregations, his congregation held a vigil which involved fasting, prayer and educational workshops in 1986. Gilbert is one of the original forces behind AIDS ministries in Philadelphia, and an organizer of the MCCP conference. He said that the next step was getting together people to theologize about AIDS.

Errata:
The Metropolitan Christian
Church should read The
Metropolitan Community
Church.

There was a time, he said, when he was doing a lot of funerals of people whose pastors would not minister to them or who had been alienated from their congregation. He hopes that he would not be doing as many. But he does say that many churches are not taken seriously by some AIDS organizations. He also wondered if there could be ways of including the Black community in AIDS ministries. For instance, an AIDS forum could be held at a Black church, rather than at the Friends Meeting House.

Thanks to Reverend Gilbert I was able to hear the Reverend Stephen Pieters, another MCC pastor, speak about living with AIDS. His testimony was personal, humorous and upbeat. The audience of about 100 men and women seemed to be appreciative. He even did something to rehabilitate Tammy Fae Baker, who interviewed him. "God is greater than AIDS" says Pieters, who insists on a program of exercise and rest. "It's time to believe in fairies."

I had heard about the Reverend Robert Prettyman and his work at St. John The Evangelist long before I met him. The Roman Catholic Church is in Center City, in the heart of the business district, and near the area where a lot of gay men make their homes. St. John's does not have large permanent population, but attracts a lot of people to masses during the day. The church, having been founded in 1830 is one of the oldest in the city. It has a long history of support of the arts and of social ministries.

Prettyman has been an assistant pastor at St. Johns since 1986. He works with a staff which includes the Director of Social Services from a local hospital and two nuns who are trained as nurses. Prettyman became involved in AIDS ministries when he started to work with PWAs at Thomas Jefferson Hospital, and when a member of a religious order asked for his help in setting up a hospice. That particular plan did not pan out because of difficulty with permits, but Prettyman still hopes there will eventually be a hospice.

St. Johns does have a number of programs for those affected by AIDS. There are monthly memorial masses, weekly prayer meetings, and a support group for "people enduring AIDS". One memorial service attracted close to 80 people. When I spoke to Prettyman, he was beginning a program to make other social and legal services available to PWAs through the church. He's also interested in keeping the heat on the state of Pennsylvania, which has had (up until now) an abysmal record with regard to AIDS.

The priest has found the chancery to be most supportive - they make referrals. I believe that Archbishop Bevilacqua has continued to be supportive of the ministry. Prettyman doesn't see any division between the work he does and a strict Roman Catholic ban on homosexual sex and IV-drug use "the Church always calls people to be the best that they can be."

Rabbi Eliot Holin heads a very large (1,900 persons) Reform Synagogue, Rodeph Shalom, with a long history in Philadelphia. The building on North Broad Street was built in 1928 when many congregants lived in the city. Now 60 percent live in the suburbs and there is a suburban facility in Elkins Park. Although Rodeph Shalom has a large population of singles, there is not a large gay population. (Jewish gays and lesbians would tend to go to the gay congregation headed by Rabbi Linda Holtzman, Beth Ahavah. Though, I was unable to reach Rabbi Holtzman, she may be the person with the most immediate experience of gay Jewish PWAs.)

Although he does not have a lot of constituents for AIDS ministry, Rabbi Holin has attempted to raise his congregation's awareness. He has preached on AIDS and let people know that he is involved with AIDS and the clergy hotline. He and other clergy involved with ACTION AIDS have been trying to figure out how to sensitize congregations. The Reform Movement in Philadelphia, as has been mentioned before, did hold a one day seminar at Kneseth Israel, which

200-500 people. But Holin says that his sense is that most people are going through a "great deal of denial" about AIDS. This spring Holin invited those who had signed up for the ACTION AIDS clergy hotline to a luncheon to discuss ways of "healing the healers". The lunch was cancelled due to poor response. I also spoke to Rabbi Randi Musmisky, who works with the Reform movement's regional director, Rabbi Richard Address. Musmisky has done some education at her congregation in Cherry Hill, NJ. My impression from our conversation is that there have not been a considerable number of Jewish gay men affected by AIDS with strong ties to synagogues.

A conversation with Rabbi Gerald Wolpe of Har Zion in Penn Valley bore out this impression. Wolpe, a Conservative Rabbi, is also a renowned medical ethicist who sits on the bioethics committee of the Board of Rabbis. One of his congregants has been very active in AIDS work in Philadelphia, but AIDS has not really touched his suburban affluent congregation. It is rabbis like Wolpe and Holin, however, who have the clout to influence AIDS policies at the judicatory level.

It is interesting that in two denominations, AIDS education and information efforts, have been started at the grass-roots levels by suburban parishes. Reverend John Nesbitt at St. Marks Methodist Church in Broomall was spurred to action by the death of an elderly man in his congregation due to an infected blood transfusion. The Reverend J. Barrie Shepherd, at Swarthmore Presbyterian Church, lost his best friend in seminary to AIDS. Both men have been active in their churches and in their judicatories. "It was the most horrible death I have experienced in 25 years" says Nesbitt. His parishioner was one of the pillars of the church. First he was misdiagnosed, then the insurance companies fought with one another over paying his medical bill. At one point, Nesbitt had to decide whether he should tell the congregation his

parishioner had AIDS. The man and his wife gave him permission. Nesbitt doesn't know what he would have done if they hadn't. A popular member of the congregation, the man had a lot of people who wanted to visit him. This a truly delicate ethical dilemma: do you tell people who may have lots of fears about AIDS that one of their friends has it, or do you seek to hide it, knowing they may be angry later?

Fortunately, Nesbitt has a number of strong laypeople, and the congregation was quite caring. It was also probably fortunate that the man in question had gotten AIDS from a blood transfusion, rather than through drugs or gay sex. The congregation is not "a locus for gays or drug abusers". The forty-year old parish attracts 400 people on a Sunday, with a membership of 700. People in the congregation reached out to the man and his wife. They prayed for them and called on him. Nesbitt's Visitors Task Force really came through.

It is on the judicatory level that Nesbitt has done a lot of his work. He sent a survey to all 500 UMC clergy in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Conference. Questions range from whether a pastor has PWAs in his congregation to what specific support groups are available in his or her area. Bishop Skeete (the previous bishop in this conference) has appointed Nesbitt head of the Eastern Conference AIDS Task Force. When I spoke with the minister in late spring, he had received 150 responses, really quite an extraordinary return. He guessed that of the 150, about 5 had PWAs in their congregations and maybe 25 knew of support groups. He only received a few extremely reactionary responses.

Nesbitt and his colleagues on the committee were planning to have persons knowledgeable about AIDS at the annual conference so that pastors could talk with them one-on-one. There were also trying to come up with a video and a

resource list. He was able to get funds for these projects from the Health and Welfare Commission, and he says that other dollars were available in the Program area.

The Reverend J. Barrie Shepherd is the senior minister at Swarthmore Presbyterian Church. Although I did not speak with him in person, he responded to a questionnaire. Aside from his experience with his seminary classmate, he has had two persons with AIDS or ARC in his congregation. Printed materials on AIDS were a very high priority with him, as was a speaker bureau on AIDS network. He indicated that he was not sure what medical and related patient services were available in his area, with the exception of "spiritual/religious support" and "burial/funeral homes that provide services to AIDS victims". When asked what the Commission could provide in the way of help, he suggested "Information on above resources and their availability or otherwise." His greatest concern in relationship to AIDS is: "to stop religious or public prejudice and concentrate on compassion and care". Shepherd's church held a program in the late spring, with Dr. Mark Smith as the main speaker. The Reverend Dr. Eugene C. Bey also answered to a questionnaire. His church, Bryan Mawr Presbyterian, held a conference on AIDS in late April. He asked a former member of the congregation from the CDC in Atlanta, Margaret Oxtoby, to be the keynoter. Panels addressed questions like "Can AIDS be avoided?" "What is being done to stop the spread of AIDS?" and "What are agencies doing to respond to AIDS?" Dr. Bey spoke about "How Christians should respond to AIDS."

Bey does not have any PWAs in his congregation. He would most like a resource directory, then a packet of materials, then a hotline. In descending order of preference were printed materials, a speakers bureau, and some type of network. The minister is well equipped with standard materials like the

Red Cross Pamphlets and the NCC information package. He is also aware of medical care in his area, counseling, transportation, alternative treatment approaches, and burial/funeral homes. He also knows where he can find patient representation and advocacy, as well as AIDS buddies, caregivers training, and other AIDS and human-sexuality groups. In spite of being well-informed, Bey said the most helpful thing the Commission could provide would be education. His greatest concern? "that our society will fail to respond with compassion, care and justice."

I also spoke with Reverend William Pindar at Old Pine Presbyterian Church. Old Pine hosted the first prayer vigil for those affected by AIDS. He does not have any PWAs in his congregation, which is well-off, well-educated and has a lot of medical personnel. His Health Committee is considering what to do about AIDS ministries. He does have gay leadership in his parish. Pindar would like to see a clearinghouse where churches could be informed about the needs of PWAs. He thinks we probably do not need more seminars but perhaps a church that could offer itself as an AIDS sanctuary.

One city church, First Presbyterian, has begun a meal service on a limited basis for PWAs. When I spoke with the assistant minister in the spring, members of the congregation had just begun this with one or two PWAs. They had also opened their church to Action AIDS meetings. Last spring, the church was in the process of hiring a head minister. Now that this has occurred, they may become more active.

What is striking about Shepherd and Bey is that they have taken the bull by the horns in the suburbs. The pastors of three city churches, two in areas with large gay populations, have also been willing to tackle the sensitive issues which arise when one tries to educate people about the disease. The Reverend Geneva Butz has a long track record of work with the oppressed. The

pastor of the oldest German Reformed church in the country (1727), Butz notes that her church has responded with compassion to other epidemics, notably a yellow fever epidemic in 1793. Butz has been at Old First Reformed for four years, during which time she opened an emergency shelter for the homeless. Lots of social justice groups and youth ministries meet at Old First. She is also a rotating chaplain at Pennsylvania Hospice. It was as a chaplain that she encountered her first PWA. In fact, she preached her first AIDS sermon about her work with this man back in the mid 80's. In 1987 she had an eight week seminar, using the resources of persons in the congregation who work in the medical profession. She has kept her parishioners informed about national AIDS UCC resolutions, and has held a prayer service for those affected by AIDS. In a congregation of 100, with not PWAs, she attracted 12-15 people to her classes. A play on AIDS put on at the church attracted 40 persons.

Butz is realistic about the possibility for in-depth clergy and lay commitment to AIDS ministries. "The clergy are generalists, and there are so many issues" she said. "We need a couple who will take leadership". But she sees human sexuality issues "at the heart of spirituality and the heart of life." The church has not done a good job of addressing it, but the question is: what is responsible sexuality?

Peter Wool is the pastor of First Baptist in the heart of Center City. His historic church has 160 members, with 90-00 on a Sunday. Wool, who has been at First Baptist almost five years, says the church is growing. His parish has made an effort to reach gays in gay newspapers like Au Courant; he also advertises in the Welcomat and The Philadelphia Tribune. In other words, minorities are welcome.

Wool has also done a doctorate on how to study homosexuality in the Bible. But he is aware that taking stand too far to the left of where lots of

his members are may be disturbing. Having lost two parishioners to AIDS, he says that the congregation handled it by not talking about it, yet he would like to see that change.

One incident has made him a little wary of doing extensive AIDS education. According to Wool, ACTION AIDS last fall asked to use the building for a safe sex seminar. The Board of Trustees was informed that it was an educational event. But the ads said "Hot and Healthy: Making Safer Sex Exciting." Wool and his trustees felt that the ads implicitly condoned spontaneous sex, and withdrew permission to use the building. The meeting was rescheduled for St. Luke's and the Epiphany Episcopal Church, where it was held without incident. But Wool says that flap created some animosity in the congregation. He remains active in the Philadelphia Baptist Association Task Force and has encouraged the judicatory to make a statement on AIDS patterned after the 1987 American Baptist Church statement.

Roger Broadley happens to be the priest at St. Luke's. In fact, St. Luke's, with half a dozen PWAs in the congregation has made a commitment to welcoming PWAs. Broadley, who has been there for four years, says the PWAs are completely accepted by the congregation. However, he has lost one person who was uncomfortable with ministries to gays. Most of the congregation knows about ACTION AIDS. In fact, ACTION AIDS made its home there for two years before moving to Broad Street.

There are AIDS vigils on Wednesday nights for those affected by AIDS. Broadley says that there may be a stigma attached to being a congregation which welcomes PWAs. However, most of his straight (80-person) parish is accepting. Many of them come out for the funeral of PWAs. Most are neighborhood people, a lot of whom are elderly and many quite well-educated. The 150-year old church is well-off financially.

Broadley is quite interested in setting up a hospice for PWAs. The only one he is aware of is the small one run by the Missionaries of Charity in West Philadelphia, where one must conform to a monastic lifestyle. And even Broadley, a rather enthusiastic person, thinks his Metropolitan AIDS Ministries (interfaith group) needs to go back to the drawing board. Praying together wasn't enough to keep the interfaith AIDS ministry together.

Broadley's church is the one which has, in my opinion, had the most success in educating parishioners and witnessing in the gay community. But there are reasons for that. St. Luke's can afford to take risks. Broadley has spent a lot of time on this issue. And the church is well-situated in a gay neighborhood. But it's nice to know St. Luke's is there and to see what could be accomplished.

Other churches and institutions have been forced to face AIDS and the need for new forms of ministries. A Lutheran church in Mt. Airy and a large Lutheran institution have both grappled with how to be most effective in combatting the prejudice and the bureaucratic entanglements that seem to accompany AIDS ministries.

Pastor Arvid Anderson was the interim minister at Ascension Lutheran Church in Mt. Airy. He arrived in January, having spent many years working at the former Lutheran Church in America headquarters in Germantown. In many respects, Ascension could be any church. Ascension is next to the Lutheran Seminary, with a congregation of 375 members, about 100 whom show up in church on a Sunday. Laypeople are active in all areas of ministry. The congregation has a day care center and an AA group, they used to have a food pantry.

In mid 1987, the former pastor told the congregation at Ascension that he had AIDS, and in the fall he resigned. According to Anderson the congregation

"more liberal and understanding than the average" contributed to the pastor's rent and brought him food.

Anderson feels that some members still have not expressed their feelings. He has tried to visit those who were angry. The synod did have four evenings where members could talk about the pastor's resignation.

Anderson has not done any AIDS education in the adult forum. The youth group did attend a play on AIDS at a Methodist Church. A new pastor was expected sometimes this summer. Anderson does feel that AIDS ministries should be approached on an ecumenical basis. he thinks that every congregation should have AIDS education. The former pastor, now living in a hospice, serves on the synod Task Force and has done a study of AIDS services in Philadelphia.

Obviously, this experience can leave scars on both congregation and pastor. It is important to address the anger, the hurt and the avoidance. There are going to be more ministers with AIDS, and perhaps incidents like this will make discussion of "ministering to the ministers with AIDS" less taboo.

The Lutherans have also been involved in trying to set up the first large nursing home facility for PWAs in Philadelphia. The Lutheran Homes have 18 different sites around the country. Founded 130 years ago by women, part of their mission is to serve those at greatest risk. According to the Reverend Arnold Tiemeyer, the President of the Lutheran Homes at Germantown, a study three years ago determined that the best way to serve PWAs was to set up a 20-30 bed interim facility. Those who were ill could stay there between hospital stays or for long-term nursing.

To make this happen, Lutheran Homes have formed a new corporation. BETAK is hebrew for "To lean upon, to have confidence in." BETAK has a variety of

individuals who are providers in the city of their Board of Directors Dr. John Turner, Vince Hackney (Red Cross), George Freeman (a Lutheran pastor). PWAs are also represented on the Board. When I spoke to Tiemeyer, he hoped to be in business by the end of July. The Lutheran Homes have been careful to tell local congregations their plans. Tiemeyer does anticipate community resistance to the scatter-site housing they plan for men and women PWAs.

I spoke with Dorothy Ricks on August 29, 1988. The Lutheran AIDS Task Force is starting to be active in various areas. Bishop Hand made a presentation on AIDS in the spring at Lutheran Theological Seminary which was written up in the local papers. The Task Force will be trained to go into congregations by a social worker, a theologian, and a doctor in December. Several congregations already booked them. Ricks went to a CDC conference on AIDS and minorities have already contacted Vince Hackney at the Red Cross and ACTION AIDS, as well as Steve Goldberg in New York. He does AIDS plays...Ricks wants him to come to Philadelphia. She is personally committed to AIDS ministry, excited about it, and one would guess that this committee will be a force in Philadelphia in the fall. In addition, BETAK of Lutheran Homes is going to auction to bid on AIDS housing soon. The Lutherans in the state and nationally are working on AIDS Task Forces to advocate for PWAs on legislative public policies.

For the obvious reasons, institutions working with federal, state and private regulations have to explore discrimination and public policy issues. The Lutheran Homes do have regulations with regard to AIDS, and policies on human rights. If they can work out the contracts with the city, they will be providing AIDS housing and nursing care on a larger scale than any other institutions have done in the city. But it's a complicated and delicate

process, prone to all the bureaucratic slings and arrows that get thrown whenever institutions try to work with one another.

Although Reverend Hopkins did most of the research on the minority community, I decided to follow leads with two Hispanic and two Black community leaders. To talk about AIDS as a gay white-male disease without reference to minorities would be ridiculous. I found that most church people I talked to were working in mostly White communities, which tended to skew my perceptions about AIDS, so I went looking for reality.

If you want honesty and directness, speak with Rashidah Hassan and Vince Hackney. Hassan is a Muslim and a nurse who founded Blacks Educating Blacks about Sexual Health Issues (BEBASHI) the first minority outreach program in 1985. Recently, the city gave BEBASHI \$100,000 for education on sexually transmitted diseases. BEBASHI gives out brochures that are easy to read. They do small-group presentations and all day programs. They do street outreach and educate kids and young people. They work with women's organizations on AIDS. They educate the general public, using Public Service Announcements and churches, school districts, sororities, fraternities, community intervention programs. They distribute 10-20,000 condoms a month. BEBASHI is one of the founding organizations of The National Minority AIDS Council. Fortunately, Hassan has 35 volunteers, or she would be worn out (there are 120 on the list, but 35 are active.) She herself travels all over the country.

Hassan says that, because homosexuality and drug abuse are forbidden in the Islamic faith (as in Orthodox Judaism), AIDS is not an issue right now for Muslim leaders. She, however, has worked with many Black clergy and has some church leaders who travel with her and speak to congregations.

In the last six months, Black churches have been willing to confront AIDS, she says. They have had to bury PWAs and minister to their families.

But Hassan wants to let people know that, Black or White, AIDS does not discriminate. White men or Black men who fool around with Black prostitutes or with White prostitutes can get AIDS. The person next to you in the pew can be a drug user. And for the ministers, that is very hard to say to your parishioners. "It means admitting in some way you have failed," argues Hassan.

Perhaps, she thinks, the sexual pendulum is swinging back. The Herpes virus started the swing. Hassan is sensitive to the fact that it is women of color who have gotten caught between the sexual revolution of the sixties and all the health care dilemmas they face. Let alone the fact they often raise families alone. Hassan says that there is no real cooperation between the White and minority communities. She has, however, worked with Rabbi Address and Father Prettyman at St. John Roman Catholic Church. It's time to say to the churches: "go out and be counted".

Vince Hackney works for the American Red Cross Southeastern Chapter. Since early in 1987, he has done AIDS education for corporations i.e., SEPTA and the Internal Revenue Services, for the school district, and many other groups. Hackney is trained as a biochemist. A member of Canaan Baptist Church, he became involved in AIDS work when he lost a son in 1986. He started as a Health Department Volunteer, then worked as a Red Cross volunteer. The southeastern Region of Pennsylvania is the fourth largest Red Cross chapter, and Hackney and his colleague, who speaks Spanish, are busy all the time.

Hackney is very concerned about targeting the minority communities for AIDS education. He feels that the Black church, as the focus of the

community, can really make a difference. His own minister, Reverend Dillingham, has preached on AIDS; and his church held a Saturday seminar on AIDS. Hackney is working with other minority leaders to let churches know that they can be in the front lines of the war against AIDS.

It is hard to draw conclusions of the basis of two interviews, but I found both of these people extremely impressive. For a while, they were prophets in their communities. Now they are being joined by ministers who are burying PWAs and visiting them in the hospital. I know that Black pastors, medical personnel and social service workers are already making plans for AIDS education that will reach into, and beyond the church.

The Reverend Floyd Naters ("Butch") is an Episcopal priest who works in Kensington. His church, St. Barnabas, was built in the nineteenth century to serve Whites working in the mills. Now the membership is Black and Hispanic, mostly single women, heads of households, most living at poverty level. Butch is a community organizer; he has preached about AIDS, put up material on the bulletin board, shared what the Episcopal Church is doing with his congregation. He says that AIDS is hitting Kensington hard, with IV drug use, prostitution, and a lot of men who are bisexual but won't own up to it. Also, significantly, Naters said "Its hard to get people to concentrate on this issue when there are other pressing survival issues."

Naters did put together a youth network, and invited local organizations who work with kids to come to a meeting. He has checked with schools to see what they are doing in terms of AIDS education. He's trying to find creative ways of getting information out into the community for children and adolescents, he's thought of comic strips. He and other members of the Hispanic Clergy Association heard Carmen Paris talk about AIDS education. They declined, however, to sponsor safe sex parties.

The Reverend Danny Cortes is an American Baptist pastor in Kensington. First Spanish Baptist Church is ninety eight percent Puerto Rican, with a working class congregation. He has counseled PWAs two or three times, but has no persons with the disease in his congregation. He says that AIDS has just not been an issue. But it should be an issue in churches, says the minister. "My community would be most hard-hit" says Cortes. "It is probably just as a big problem here as anywhere else." Homosexuality is a taboo, he says. It is not cool, especially with the macho image, to be gay. There would be more compassion for PWAs who got AIDS from using drugs than for gay PWAs. He says that this is also probably true in White churches.

Cortes says that he himself has some work to do on AIDS: "Even though I am aware, I have not gotten to the point where I've sensitized others."

Both men made some interesting points about the Hispanic community. Naters said that many churchgoers go to Pentecostal churches. Most were raised as Roman Catholics. But many do not go to church. Cortes said that many are Catholic in name only. So the church may not be the focus of community action in the same fashion as it is in the Black community. Butch Naters, for example, seems to treat his community as a church in terms of outreach and social justice ministry. But Hispanic AIDS work, like many other aspects of Hispanic life, is just being studied in Philadelphia. There will obviously have to be unique forms of AIDS ministries developed by the churches when they find a way to deal with the disease in the midst of the "survival" issues.

Part III

STRENGTHENING PHILADELPHIA'S RELIGIOUS OUTREACH:

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

When I started this project, I had all sorts of ideas about creating models for AIDS education. They would be tailored to meet the needs of denominations, or churches or synagogues within the denominations, that had different points of views. For example, the needs of a fundamentalist church or an Orthodox synagogue would be very different from that of a UCC church or a Reform synagogue. Models would be appropriate culturally, theologically and denominationally. They would be further refined to cope with the problems members of congregations, like other humans, face when dealing with fear, grief and uncertainty.

It's not that I have given up a belief in religious education models. If we did not pay educational consultants to write Sunday school and synagogue curriculums, there would be little religious education going on. And some of the materials I look at could easily be incorporated into a curriculum on AIDS. But, in the case of AIDS, it seems a bit frivolous to recommend theoretical solutions to Hydra-like (multi-headed) problems. As one can be see by contrasting the wonderful national resolutions with actual ministries in Philadelphia, it's more productive to start from the parish level and work up.

AIDS education in a synagogue or a parish is more complicated than AIDS education in a school for one simple reason. Churches and synagogues are voluntary organizations, no one has to attend (except for small children, and if they attend, one can't rationally expect them to listen). It's always a nice shock to find out how many religious people do good works from a sense of

love and charity and many of those people are clergy and laypeople working with those affected by AIDS. But realistically, many of those I spoke to who are doing AIDS ministry have been touched in some way by the disease. They have lost a friend, or are members of a minority affected by AIDS, or are involved in other community activities which bring them into contact with PWAs.

This is also true for denominations which have been in the forefront of AIDS ministries. The Unitarian Church, which is one of the most liberal religious groups, has been open to the needs of gay people for longer than most other denominations. The Episcopal Church, while not quite as liberal, has a vocal minority of gay clergy and laypeople and a structure which permits them to be heard. (That is not to say that the Episcopal Church is free of prejudice towards gays and lesbians.) My guess is that Reform Judaism also has a group of concerned clergy and laity who work within the denominational structure.

Institutions as we all know are troglodytes. That is why its wonderful to find individuals who have been called to minister to those affected by AIDS. If one individual is committed enough to institute a program or even preach a sermon, then he or she may touch others. And, on the judicatory level, groups of men and women can use the tools available in local churches and synagogues offices to let other parishes and congregations know that there is an urgent need for volunteers and funding.

Having expressed skepticism about institutional ministries "from above", let me make a partial retraction. It does not redound to Philadelphia's credit that we are behind other major Eastern cities in forming an ecumenical network to deal with some of these issues. New York, for example, has ecumenical support for Bailey House, the AIDS residence, and for chaplain

Bernard Healey. Churches and synagogues in New York are working with state and local officials (that's not to say that its a picnic, it's more like a circus). New York has churches which feed PWAs on a large scale (like St. Peter's Lutheran in the Citycorp Building) in a cheerful and caring setting. Washington has the "Caring Response" church coalition and a Catholic Charities program and there are most likely others.

Clergy here have worked with AIDS. The group was started, in large part, by clergy. A lot of church people turned out for the Conference sponsored by the Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia. In November, the M CCP and Jewish groups are co-sponsoring an AIDS education day for clergy at Graduate Hospital. So there is some measure of ecumenical and interfaith cooperation. But there is relatively little to show that people do work together on an institutional level.

Perhaps the M CCP will act as a place where such collaboration can begin. But several factors militate against that. First of all, its a fairly small organization, with a lot on its plate already. Thanks to a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, the M CCP is undergoing intensive self-study this year, and may not have time to launch a massive AIDS education campaign. And secondly, its a Christian organization. Conceivably it could work with a group like the Board of Rabbis or the Jewish Community Relations Council, but in no way could it speak for the Jewish community. Nor, for that matter, for the Roman Catholic community. According to the assistant director of the National Council of Christians and Jews, the other organization that might coordinate such efforts has not recently been active in this area.

Initiative would have to seep up from Philadelphia judicatories to the NCCJ, which also has a small staff and is already very busy with other issues.

How to move forward with AIDS education and ministries in our unique Philadelphia context?

When I asked parish clergy about coordinated AIDS ministry, many of them responded positively. (Chaplains don't seem to want an expert coming in and monkeying with their work, someone to help parishes coordinate THEIR work, however, might be alright with chaplains.) This city is really crying out for a man or a woman like Bernard Healey, the Pastoral Care Coordinator at Bailey House. He could offer support to clergy, keep track of which ones do AIDS ministries, and refer clients to them. He also has a good idea of what else is going on in the city. In addition, a person like Bernard Healey would be savvy about working with the city. And if churches and synagogues (perhaps corporation and foundations) supported a person like this, it would give them an investment on AIDS ministries in the city and suburbs. In addition, it might help battle the clerical malaise which express itself in workaholism, isolation and cynicism.

In addition, judicatory officials (like bishops and executives directors) need to sensitize themselves to issues facing clergy who are working with those affected by AIDS. They should be up-to-date on denominational materials. There is some very good material out there. And the staff responsible for the "social concerns" committee should keep AIDS on the front burner. It would also be nice if the clergy who are burning themselves out ministering to PWAs and educating their congregations, and laity who are doing the same, were recognized by their judicatories. Laypeople have often been the spur for AIDS ministries; most couldn't be done without them. So often, clergy feel that they need to educate their flocks. More often that not, it's the sheep who turn around and push the shepherd back into the road.

A host of other issues complicates the situation with minority communities. In some cases churches are trying to help their men and women survive in the midst of poverty, teen pregnancy and drugs. In other, middle class churches face questions similar to those of the dominant culture: fears of homosexuality; denial of a drug problem; the "it can't happen to me" mode of denial. I don't presume to speak for Black or Hispanic leaders. Suffice it to say that there are initiatives in these communities. Work still needs to be done in evaluating other minority communities, such as the growing Korean churches. In addition, it would be helpful to know what is going on with Muslim communities.

The picture of AIDS ministries in the city will become clearer as time goes on. Already denominations and corporative bodies are taking new steps. Unfortunately, those steps are probably linked to the growing number of PWAs in the pew. But caring about the man or woman sitting next to you in church or temple is the way the ministry begins. And once a layperson asks the first question about AIDS, or a clergy person counsels his or her first PWA, then the possibilities for education are endless. The most effective ministry takes place at the grassroots.

Most of all, clergy and interested laity can call their congregations to be aware of the devastating impact of AIDS on families, individuals and institutions. And, as a friend of mine said, perhaps they will, if they become involved in such ministries, realize that the time spent with a person living with AIDS is priceless. "I have gotten so much more than I have given" he said.

There are remarkable men and women who have crossed the road to bind up the wounds of the men and women by the roadsides of this city. We are priest, Levite, Samaritan, and Christians alike. Will we cross over with them?